

# Emerging Writers

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Volume 5

Article 3

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2022

## The Window to the Soul

Erica Bolding

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### Recommended Citation

Bolding, Erica (2022) "The Window to the Soul," *Emerging Writers*: Vol. 5, Article 3.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/emergingwriters/vol5/iss1/3>

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## The Window to The Soul

by Erica Bolding

### So, What's The Problem?

They say that eyes are the window to the soul. While that may be true, I would say that tone of voice is also the window to the soul. In a world where mental health awareness is on the rise, I feel it is important to recognize an undermined language issue that is tone. One's [tone of voice](#) is vital to communicating effectively (Pellicano). Tone is also a non-verbal language that I feel is overlooked. There are various types of tones that one can use, such as:

TONES
Soft
Sweet
Funny
Sarcastic
Serious
Happy
Curious
Hurt
Angry/frustrated

Society enjoys when people use happy, soft, sweet, funny, and even sarcastic tones (for comedic effect). However, when it comes to overly serious tones or angry tones (raised voices) people automatically assume that it is disrespectful towards them. Sure, there are circumstances where a raised voice is rude and inappropriate, but the question I raise is this: is it always inappropriate to raise your voice or shift your tone in conversation? I argue that tone is a new language that is evolving alongside its partner which is a verbally spoken language. Tone tells the story of the inner chaos going on inside oneself that cannot be verbally expressed.

## **Memoir**

The room smelled of essential oils. My mom, fighting a small cold, had the diffuser next to her bed. She was sitting up in her bed looking at her phone as I stood in the doorway leaning up against the wall with my arms crossed on my chest. My throat ached as I tried to hold back my tears. I was stressed and overwhelmed; I felt alone. I felt stuck and like nothing would ever change. I wasn't where I wanted to be, and life was not what I thought it would be. The room was chilly because she kept her fan on high. The only light was from the two lamps that she always had on. She looked concerned as her eyes saw straight through me. She had a slight frown on her face as she saw tears swelling in my eyes. She knew what I was thinking.

My mom is a single parent, but she was not always one. My dad died six, going on seven, years ago, leaving her a widow at forty-two years old. She is by far the strongest woman I know, filled with a love for life and joy despite her tragedy. My mom has a great gift of discernment. She can spot a lie from a mile away and vice versa with the truth. She carries, though, a significant amount of stress. Single-mom life is far from easy. She is responsible for everything: bills, food, education, clothes, etc. Every now and then the stress will get to her, but this happens rarely. Through every moment of my life, she has been my rock and my best friend. At that moment in time, she was the listener.

## **What Are We Listening To?**

We as people listen to things all the time. We listen to music, television shows, movies, and plays. With that also, we listen to voices: voices of joy, voices of anger, voices of despair, and so on. When we hear those voices, we are listening for tone. The way we say things changes phrases' meanings. For example, the video I have linked in the introduction describes the idea of how changing tone to emphasize different words in a singular phrase can change the entire

meaning of that phrase. An example the woman in the video uses is the phrase “I know the answer.” The phrase can mold itself into many different meanings because of a change in tone. It can be said with certainty or uncertainty depending on what tone a person uses. Therefore, what we say changes with our tone of voice. The meaning of words changes when we change our tone. Tone is complex, and frankly, I am about to make it even more complex. Before I do though, let’s continue where we left off.

### **Memoir Continued**

She reached for her hand cream because her hands were always dry. She squeezed out a tiny amount to rub into her hands. After she placed the small tube of lotion down and rubbed it into her dry, cracked hands, she returned her gaze to me. She asked me what was wrong, and I started to break down. At that point, I was under a massive amount of pressure. I was an eighteen-year-old girl who had just started college, with the pressure of living in a single-parent household, the pressure of having to make my own money, the pressure of working, the pressure to keep my grades up, the pressure to make friends, the pressure to succeed.

### **Stop: Listen to Me**

Since my dad died, I have dealt with massive amounts of trauma that have led me to battle depression and anxiety. Most of the time, I can handle it well, but when life gets too overwhelming it takes me back into a dark place. I can’t handle as much, and my inner self starts to cripple itself. One of the symptoms of this horrible disease called depression is that when I reach my limits I tend to lash out. Quite frankly, I hate it. Yet, I cannot help but desire to have somebody hear me. I am unable to express my trials verbally; therefore I physically cannot express it any other way.

## **Back to the Memoir**

I was frustrated due to feeling that I was the one taking on massive amounts of responsibility while she got to experience a more laid-back lifestyle. I am a full-time college student with a part-time job at a law firm. I run back and forth every day to get my mom to work, my sister Ivey and myself to school, myself to work, and sometimes get Ivey to work too. We have one car between the three of us (my mom, sister, and I) so our schedule runs tight. My mom was growing in concern by the minute, and she finally asked, “Sweetie, what’s on your mind?” I simply looked down at my feet because this question triggered my emotions. I did not know how to formulate my words to tell her exactly what was wrong. She continued, “Erica, baby, I need you to tell me what’s bothering you. I can tell something is off.” Her words lingered in my mind for a few moments before I finally breathed out in a broken and raised voice, “I’m tired. I can’t live like this anymore! I’m tired of putting up with it, and I’m tired of picking up Ivey’s slack.” Mom stopped me for a second saying, “Erica...” in that tone where you know she is saying, “You know there is only so much I can do. I am doing my best, but she has to step up too.” Of course, I know this part of it. Furthermore, I was not necessarily blaming my mom for my sister’s actions; however, I was angry and mentally exhausted, so it seems it came out that way.

## **What Tone?**

Tone changes with our attitudes. Our attitude is also a reflection of what is going on inside the mind. Typically, if someone is grumpy their tone often matches their attitude. In this circumstance, not even I can argue against that specific tone being disrespectful. Unless I present this question, why are they grumpy? Are they grumpy because they did not get their way or are they not actually grumpy but rather hurting? There is a difference. One is justifiable while the other is not. An off tone because something did not go your way is undoubtedly rude and can

speak for itself. My mom only said one word, but she meant something more. One word turned into twenty-two merely because of her tone.

## Back Again

“Why am I the only one who is taking responsibility?” I said as I shifted my weight off the doorway. “Why can’t the 20-year-old take some of this off of me? I’m 18 and doing way more than she’s ever done. I can’t do it all. We live in a single-parent household, and everything is difficult.” I paused for a moment to hold back my tears, “We have to start working as a team. And YOU have to start making her take some responsibility.” My mom’s eyes widened for a split second as I continued, “You hold her hand through everything; SHE’S ALMOST 20!” I shouted as my mom looked back down at her hands.

## Yes, I Yell

What many fail to recognize is that when someone is yelling, they are not always directing it towards a person. Rather, they are directing that tone towards their emotions that are unable to be processed. Deep emotions that come with severe mental health issues can cause severe reactions that often do not present themselves in an obvious fashion. Depression, for example, has multiple side effects that often cause interference with the way people with this disorder communicate. Due to the imbalance of hormones, irritation can occur



much easier and much more frequently because of the lack of ability to process emotions. Take a

moment and reference the picture provided (Soriano and Cogliostro). Examine those symptoms, try to feel them for a moment.<sup>1</sup> I ultimately want to focus on the symptom listed in the bottom left corner, irritability. However, before I do that, I want to examine the others to see how they all could correlate.

Depression is complex, and this illustration above simplifies the complexities so that it is explainable. There is a plethora of cause-and-effect symptoms that are involved with depression; each symptom can cause another. Take trouble sleeping and appetite changes. Lack of sleep can cause the entire function of the human body to change, including one's appetite. Lack of nourishment can lead to fatigue, fatigue can lead to difficulty concentrating, lack of concentration can lead to desperate feelings of sadness (because one does not feel productive anymore), and feelings of prolonged sadness can lead to thoughts of suicide. How can these symptoms not cause one to lash out? The answer is simply this: these symptoms are so persistent and so prevalent that it should not be in question why someone with this disorder is yelling. How could they not? The influx of heavy and extreme emotions causes outbursts that reveal the inner chaos of that person's mind; the thoughts and feelings that one cannot figure out how to verbally express, and the internal darkness that they want the light to shine on so badly, is expressed through their "violent" tone as opposed to their words.

### **Take Me Back to The Scene**

"She has to start doing it on her own. You don't hold my hand so why hold hers? I deal with so much inner chaos every day and I still get up and do what has to be done." She swiftly shifted her head back up to look at me, "She has been allowed to sit there and do nothing because she's anxious and because of that I've never had the chance to just sit and be still with my own

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to take a moment and clarify that these are not the only symptoms to depression. I do not want to generalize depression into a singular picture off the internet. Depression is highly complex and manifests itself in several ways that is subject to each person. I would be insensitive and ignorant to not make this discretion.

problems. I don't let it stop me and I don't make excuses for myself." She grimaced as she reflected on what I had said so far. Part of her was upset that my voice was no quieter than it was. Admittedly my voice was raised by the time I had made my claim about her holding my sister's hand (not literally but theoretically). What's interesting was this: the focus was seemingly on frustration with my sister. In reality, though, this was not the core issue.

### **Wait, Let Me Clarify!**

I said before, I struggle with depression and anxiety, and sometimes even suicidal thoughts. For a while, those problems disappeared, and they were not nearly as prevalent as they were before. However, as the new school year began, these monsters crept back up to haunt me like slithering snakes. I was afraid and I did not know how to express to my mom that I was dealing with issues again. So yes, all those things I cried over were and are true. They are real struggles, but inside my head, I was attempting to tell my mom something else. I needed my mom to know what was going on inside my head; I felt like a soldier who was losing the battle.

### **Flipped Side of The Coin**

Of course, there are circumstances where one must be hyper-aware of their tone for respect purposes. It would be absurd for one to yell at their boss or in most circumstances yell at one's elders. Or a teacher yelling at young students, like in this [video](#), without probable cause is utterly ridiculous and should be stopped (New York Times). Where the issue lies, though, is when is it inappropriate and appropriate to use such a tone? For some, this argument is not even worth mentioning. They will take examples like the ones mentioned above and automatically rule out any sort of raised tone. Horrific circumstances like these will blind them from seeing the flipped side of the coin. That is, they will be blind to see how raised voices can serve as a warning sign. From their perspective, raising one's voice is always off-limits and never beneficial. It always has

a negative connotation because from most people's perspectives, they believe that every time someone yells it is directed towards them. They feel personally attacked. While this does happen, and we need to acknowledge it and change that behavior, it does not mean that this is always the case.

## **Expression**

Tone is often described as the defining factor behind what someone means. This is exactly right, but it is often misinterpreted. Society hyper-focuses on tone in the wrong way. Our focus should be on hearing what the tone has to say rather than listening to it mindlessly, assuming it is a threat to ourselves and undermining the words behind the tone. This is becoming an ongoing and dangerous issue from my observation and experience. Before, I said tone is vital to communication, and it is. However, I mean this differently than how one might assume. Throughout this journey we have taken so far, I feel that it has been made clear that tone is the window to the soul. Yet, despite this knowledge that tone is so vital, we still refuse to address the real issue which is that tone is the unspoken language of the hurting.

So, when I say that tone is vital, I mean something new. I mean that tone is attempting to tell us something. In circumstances where there is a person battling disorders such as anxiety, depression, bipolar, ADHD, borderline personality disorder, and other mental illnesses, I think it is imperative to view their tone in a new light. People with these disorders are not attempting to offend you by being rude. This is quite the opposite. They want to tell you something, but they do not know how to do so.

Take this trending [TikTok](#) sound for instance (Ally). The TikTok is of a girl who captions First, "lashes out randomly, always on edge, easily frustrated, no motivation" that then switches to three new phrases stating, "so disrespectful," "no one wants to be around her," and "she's such a b\*\*\*\*." The video ends with the girl mouthing the words to the end of the sound that says, "why

can't you f\*\*\*ing hear me?" This is a powerful TikTok trend that breaks the typical TikTok stereotype of fun and meaningless dances. It is utilizing a platform to spread awareness about a subject that is becoming increasingly more important. It also provides a perfect example of how just because someone is lashing out or is easily frustrated does not mean that they intend to be disrespectful. They are desperately trying to get someone to hear them and see them. All that they want is for someone to see them drowning. It is not the person themselves who is screaming at you but their inner demons begging you to hear them. They use their tone hoping you pick up on their cue for you to dive into the raging seas and help them. Their raised voice is not an act of disrespect; rather it is an audible cry for help. They want to be seen because they do not feel seen, and they want to be heard because they do not feel heard.

### **Okay, I'm Finished.**

Often, I have found myself in similar situations to what I just described. As a person who has battled and still battles mental illnesses such as anxiety and depression, I have noticed that my tendency to raise my voice when upset is my subconscious mind pushing for myself to be heard. I struggle with feeling that I am seen and heard. What is a bulletproof way to be seen and heard? Raise your voice. It turns heads, it rings in ears, it silences a room, and grabs everyone's attention without fail. Yet, my goal is not to appear disrespectful. However, it still is perceived that way. Semi-rightfully so, we know nothing else as a society other than to assume the raising of one's voice is automatic disrespect. Yet, my challenge is this, to change that perspective. By changing this perspective, society might be able to understand those with mental disorders better. We might be able to discern more effectively those who could be struggling with mental illness. Changing this perspective could even save lives. If we can learn the cues, if we can swallow our feelings of pride, we may just be able to pick up on the non-verbal cries for help and keep

someone alive. What if we did that? How would our world change? How would your world change?

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